

Education Governance Responses
Burlington Meeting (1/30/07) – Burlington High School

40 Attendees (facilitated by Robin Scheu, aided by Jill Remick, Wendy Ross and Bev Heise;
Commissioner Richard Cate in attendance)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

Community connections to local schools
Ability for many community people to be involved
Town meetings (face to face communication)
Everyone knows a board member
Communication
Knowledge
Strong community priority
Fosters “myth” of local control
People understand the system
Small classes
Smaller units – people feel connected
School boards with 5-9 members can devote attention to one school
Good collaboration between school boards

Disadvantages

Superintendent – many meetings/can’t focus on educational issues
Conflicting directions from multiple school boards
Difficulty attracting enough school board members
Many redundancies
Lack of consistency between bldgs/district
Confused chain of command
Complexities of governance structures
Cost – local contracts drive up costs
Multiple boards
Lack of leadership in education hierarchy
Lack of qualified board members
Less focus/momentum = fewer grants
Bulk buying
Leadership burnout
Lack of control by superintendent
Small schools have lack of programs
Substantial expense for school boards
Lack of coordination in curriculum between sending schools
Not much diversity in small schools
Running out of volunteers to serve on school boards
Don’t have economics of scale – purchasing, back room operations
Cumbersome flow of information in both directions
Too many levels
Supervisory district boards too big

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

Operational efficiencies
Cost can only go down
Quality of education goes up
Sustainability for quality of education
Better decision making
More opportunity for grant money
Timing. "Hard times" must capitalize on this
One board vs multiple
Sharing of resources-more flexibility w/staff & resources
Increased educational opportunities
Board responsibility for better education
Superintendents choose their principals
Minimized micro-management by school board
Allow better superintendent management skills
More clarity to voters
More clarity of chain of command
More ability to focus on big educational issues
More expedited process to develop policy
Better utilization of the D.O.E.
Efficient
Less money spent
Makes management positions more attractive to potential candidates
Coordinated curriculum
Less provincial board point of view
Likely to retain superintendents & principals since fewer meetings & clearer lines of responsibility/communications
Economies of scale
Allowing superintendent to focus on important educational issues & work with citizens from individual schools
Would prove that we can change – would create momentum for changes in other areas

Disadvantages

Doesn't go far enough
Loss of sense of community (perceived)
Turmoil in contract negotiations
Larger districts can redraw school boundaries to help w/educational problems
Potential to lower to LCD
Transitional issues
Sense of loss
Weighted vote/loss of control
Risk of school closing
Dynamics of needs differ
Fear of school budgets not passing (no local ownership)
Fewer people involved at local board level
Proposal needs to speak to how community members can stay involved in local schools

Voters' perception – "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"
Distance to school board meetings for citizens & more intimidating
Fear that smaller schools will not get attention, resources, and time on agenda
Equal representation concerns
Loss of small unit "feel"/loss of identity

Additional Thoughts

Statewide teachers' contracts/negotiations
Statewide administrative contracts
Statewide administrative services
District Carousel meetings – multiple boards meeting together
With Commissioner's model, encourage creation of school advisory boards for each school (staffed by principals)- official status with time at school board agenda
Require approach (as apposed to allowing the option) with a phase-in period
Develop clear vision of future – expectations regarding outcomes will help in "selling" the initiative
Expanded school choice within districts to elementary levels
Provision of Special Ed/Tech Ed/ESL transportation at State/Regional level
Level over location
Local is too local (NCLB, etc.)
Statewide budget for Special Ed (not local)
Consolidation of services
Chittenden County Pilot program
Consolidation factors: diversity, socio-economic, funding based on income, transportation money
Good teachers influence spread over greater number of students
Superb grant writer
Statewide benefit programs
How is this change going to impact educational quality and/or cost for the 21st century?

Surprises:

So many people think this will save money, ie. Teacher salaries would go up
Consistency of opinion here
Very interested that statewide teachers' contract came up

Question:

Focus on areas to pilot
Timeline – after first 10 meetings will have interim report; final at conclusion of meetings in May.
Will we see what is said in other areas (on Web site of DOE; meeting by meeting?)
When looking for legislative action? Up to the legislature; perhaps in next 2 yrs.